

people who were my age and I missed the midnight runs to Subway and talking until all hours of the night.

Going away to college taught me a very important lesson. It taught me to trust my instincts. Although I was nervous to be away from my home, I had to be willing to take a chance and experience a new way of life. It taught me to be a leader and not a follower. I could have chosen to stay home and attend the local university, but then I would have missed out on all the wonderful times that I have had at Valparaiso. There are still times that I miss home and I want to give up, but then I talk to someone on my wing or think about all that I have accomplished so far and I realize how lucky I am to have had the opportunity to go away to school. At times it is very hard, but then again no one said that college would be easy.

PAST CIVILIZATIONS OF THE BACKYARD

by
Erin Carey

Communications Major
Marcus-Meriden-Cleghorn High School, Marcus, IA

[Assignment: Describe a place for which you hold significant emotions. It could be a place you have been to only once or one you visit regularly.]

Pull the bikes out of the cobwebs in the garage. Ride over the short grass and weeds past assorted tool sheds and the shining metal grain bins. Go up to the kennel with the peeling dull red paint and find what my brothers and I thought was a wonderful playground, the rock pile.

Have you ever heard of those child safety rules such as keep within view of your parents and do not play on rusty farm equipment? Well, we hadn't. Our private playground consisted of a pile of broken concrete and bricks heaped up next to a low hill surrounded by a weed patch and old farm equipment. One border was the unused kennel, another was the barbed wire fence, bent from years of kids scrambling over it, that surrounded the nearest windbreak of trees. The rest of the area gave way to open fields that separated us from our closest neighbors with miles of corn and soybeans. There, over the hum of the drying fans in the grain bins, surrounded by the warm, dry smell of black dirt and the tangy summertime scent of the sunscreen our mother made us slather on, we played.

One game was that we were looking for dinosaur bones. We would climb up the rock pile while studying the jagged white pieces of concrete to find shells and small white bones that we would dig out with the chisels that were stolen from our father's toolbox. We kept the precious

finds in our pockets so we would not lose them when the sharp-edged blocks fell from beneath our bare feet like glass tinkling to the ground.

That game gave way to another when we found the curved shards of purple and green glass bottles and dusty blue and white ceramic embedded in the blocks. We were then looking for clues that would tell the story of the extinction of the lost civilization that had given us their garbage for our toys.

On one end of the heap, there was a refrigerator-sized hollowed-out concrete box topped with a blob of darker cement with the imprints of a hand and a date. We pretended that this unique playhouse was a jail, and once inside, we would hack at one wall with our chisels and make up fantastic plots to escape from the prison. In all the years that we played these games, we never broke out, but we kept trying.

Also, my brothers, temporary farmer wannabes, would run out into the waist-high grass that had gone to seed and pull up handfuls of "wheat" to store in the prison/barn. Bored with their game, I would follow the soft mewling of the palm-sized kittens that followed us everywhere we went on the farm but got lost in the tall grass and fell into crevices between bricks when we visited our playground. Other times, I would pull myself up onto the soft and decaying boards of the useless hay rack that was planted in the middle of the lot. Then I would test how close I could get to the gaping holes left by rotted boards of the rack without breaking off more and falling.

More of the playground's "equipment" was used in our favorite game, "olden days." The all-important log cabin, in the nearby grove, was the giant wooden spool that once upon a time came on the back of a truck holding cable or barbed-wire or some other economy-sized farm essential. The second story could only be reached by piling up some of the least destroyed bricks on the lower end and climbing over the edge; however, I have no idea how we got down. A purposeless rusted iron square, upright in the ground with a horseshoe-shaped piece tied onto it, became a pump when the horseshoe was swayed. The old plow, overgrown with weeds, also had a role in the game but I do not remember what.

Usually, our games would be broken by a creak on the back door of our house and a shout inviting us to come inside. Other times, the tractor mower would come near and halt its slow motion long enough for our father to make the understood sign for supper being ready without turning off the roaring of the chopper blades.

Take one last look at the trees that are glittering as they blow in the now cold wind and reflect the golden light of the falling sun. Look at the neon orange sun and the bright pink zebra stripes that the light forms with the narrow bands of gray clouds. Scoop the kittens into the flowered blue bike basket and go home since the sun and the games are gone for the day, but don't forget the dreams.